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MR. MORLEY'S LIFE OF GLADSTONE.—II.

BY GOLDWIN SMITH.

GLADSTONE'S declaration, at a critical juncture of the American war, that Jefferson Davis had made a nation, gave deep offence to the friends of the North both in the United States and in England. But he atoned for it by frank and honorable repentance. As a statement of fact, it lacked truth only in so far that Davis, instead of making the South a nation, had found it one already made. The schism between the Free and Slave States was inevitable, and the war was from the outset one between nations. That Gladstone subscribed to the Confederate loan was false, nor is there the slightest reason for believing that he was less faithful than any of his colleagues to the policy of strict neutrality, however ready he may have been, in common with the rest, to tender good offices in a contest in which, as it deprived millions of British artisans of the materials of their industry, Great Britain had a manifest and pressing interest. I would not positively assert that the son of a slave-owner felt the same intense abhorrence of slavery as Wilberforce, or that a High Churchman fully equalled in his zeal for emancipation the Evangelicals whose special heritage it was. But Gladstone's actuating motives, certainly, were his regard for the bread of the British artisan, and his sympathy with all who were struggling to be free. With a view, probably, to the satisfaction of mortified friends of the North in England, he wrote to a friend suggesting that, if the North thought fit to let the South go, it might in time be indemnified by the union of Canada with the Northern States. As the letter, on consideration, seemed unlikely to have the desired effect, and not unlikely at some future time to prove embarrassing to the writer, no use was made of it and it was destroyed.

Had it been possible for the son of a Jamaica proprietor to be

an ardent emancipationist and a warm friend of the negro, Gladstone could hardly have failed to show his feelings on the occasion of the Jamaica massacre, that most atrocious outpouring of white hatred, rage, and panic on the black peasantry of Jamaica. However, he had the general sentiment of the upper classes and of the clergy of the State Church upon his side.

Peel, as Premier, had been master of the Government, as well as head, in the last resort, of every Department. His habit had been to hear what all the members of his Cabinet had to say, and then make up his mind. In his time, there was no voting or disclosure of Cabinet proceedings. Disclosure of Cabinet proceedings is, in fact, at variance with the Privy Councillor's oath. Gladstone, it appears, put questions to the vote. He also allowed a member of the Cabinet to set forth on a political adventure of his own and proclaim a policy independent of that of his chief and his colleagues, as the same politician is now again doing. The Cabinet system itself since Gladstone's Premiership is apparently beginning to give way. There is a commencement of the change which has now made the Cabinet an unwieldy body, meeting at long intervals and almost publicly, while the real power and the direction of policy centre in an inner conclave, something like that which, in the reign of Charles II., was called a Cabal.

Not only the Cabinet system but the party system, on which the Cabinet system was based, had begun to show signs of disintegration. Sectionalism had set in, as it was pretty sure to do when political speculation had grown more free and there was no controlling issue, like that of Parliamentary Reform in 1832, to hold a party together. Personal ambition was also becoming restless and difficult to control. More than once, Gladstone's Government was defeated by the bolting of its own supporters. The task of a Premier was not easy. Allowance must be made for this, when we compare the measure of Gladstone's success as head of the Government with that of his predecessors, and with the measure of his own success as Chancellor of the Exchequer, giving life and force to the Government by his triumphs in finance.

Of the truth of the charges of want of knowledge of men and of personal tact, often brought against Gladstone as Premier, I cannot pretend to judge. There was certainly no lack in him of social affability or charm. He may not have practised the jovial familiarities of Palmerston or had a counterpart of Lady Palm-

erston's Salon. But the lack of such things, or a want of what is called personal magnetism, will hardly deprive a great leader, such as Pitt or Peel, of the devotion of partisans, much less of the trust and attachment of the people.

Once, however, it must be owned, Gladstone as Premier was guilty of a blunder, if it was nothing more, which could not fail to shake the confidence of his party. I happened to be revisiting England and was at Manchester, when, like a bolt out of the blue, without notice or warning of any kind, came upon us the dissolution of 1874. All Liberals saw at once that it was ruin. It seems that the leader himself contemplated, and almost counted on, defeat. What was it, then, that moved him to this desperate act? His Chancellor and devoted friend, Lord Selborne (Rundell Palmer), does not doubt that it was a personal dilemma in which he had involved himself, by taking the Chancellorship of the Exchequer in addition to the First Lordship of the Treasury without going to his constituents for re-election—a violation, there was reason to apprehend, of the law. The only escape from that dilemma, according to the Chancellor, was dissolution. Mr. Morley, to whose authority I should willingly defer, strenuously denies the impeachment, and points to another ground, assigned by Mr. Gladstone. Mr. Gladstone was, of course, sure to assign another ground, and equally sure to persuade himself that it was the real one. But what was that other ground? It was, in fact, that the Government was sick, and that the election would put it out of its misery, thereby clearing the situation, while it would deprive a number of Gladstone's followers of their seats. Why was the stroke so sudden? On the other hand, the charge of bribing the constituencies by promising to repeal the income tax, Mr. Morley is perfectly right in dismissing as baseless. Such expectations are held out by all competitors for power. What is the game of party but that of outbidding the other side?

After this defeat, Achilles retired in dudgeon to his tent. Gladstone insisted on resigning the leadership. But everybody foresaw that his return to it was inevitable; and it was difficult to fix on a man of sufficient eminence to take his place, and yet not too eminent to give it up when the great man might see fit to return. Lord Hartington was chosen as one whose comparative youth would make the surrender easy in his case, while his high rank would continue to sustain his position.

Whenever there was fighting to be done for the party, either in Parliamentary debate or on the stump, Gladstone was the man. His Midlothian campaign displayed his almost miraculous powers as a speaker, while it called forth the enthusiastic feeling of the people for the man in whom they thought, and rightly, that they saw their heartiest friend and the most powerful advocate of their interests. Three speeches in one day and an address this prodigy of nature could deliver, and the speeches were not flummery and clap-trap, but addressed to the intelligence of the people. Yet, one cannot help being rather sorry that the stump should have been so much dignified by Gladstone's practice. It is a great evil. To say nothing of its effect upon the passions of the audience, it wears out the statesman; it deprives him, in the intervals of Parliament, of leisure for study and reflection. Worst of all, it tempts him imprudently to commit himself.

In the case of armed intervention in Egypt, Gladstone seemed to swerve from his usual fidelity to a policy of moderation and peace. It lost him Bright, to whom as he advanced in Liberalism he had been drawing closer, and who had been induced to take office in his Government. Bright would have nothing to do with aggrandizement or war, and in private his words were strong, though in public he showed chivalrous forbearance towards his friends. Seeing that Egypt lay on the road to India and commanded the Suez Canal, it does not appear that the illustrious Quaker would have had much reason for finding fault with Gladstone and his Government, so far as the main scope of their policy was concerned. The fatal mistake, as it turned out, was the employment of Gordon, a heroic enthusiast, whose action no one could well foresee, who perhaps could hardly foresee his own, and who was not the best agent to be selected for carrying out a policy of retreat. That Gladstone went to the opera after receiving news of Gordon's death, as his malignant enemies said, was denied. But, even if he had, would any real want of feeling have been implied in his continuing to take his ordinary relief from the load of toil and anxiety which he bore?

In the case of the Transvaal Republic, Gladstone had the moral courage, in face of the agitation caused by Majuba Hill, to avow that he shrank from "blood-guiltiness," and to keep the nation in the path of honor and justice.

The last act of this wonderful life drama and its catastrophe

connect themselves with the history of Ireland and are scarcely of a brighter hue than the rest of that sad story. The case of Ireland with which, at this juncture, statesmanship had to deal, if it was clearly apprehended, was never, so far as I remember, very clearly set forth, either by Mr. Gladstone or by any one who took part in the discussion. Cromwell had given Ireland the indispensable boon of free trade with Great Britain. Succeeding Governments, less wise and magnanimous, had allowed British protectionism to kill the great Irish industries, the cattle trade and the wool trade. The people were thus thrown for subsistence entirely on the cultivation of the soil, in an island far the greater part of which is too wet for the profitable raising of cereals, and lends itself only to grazing. Then came the Penal Code, and to economical destitution was added utter social degradation. The people were reduced to a state bordering on absolute barbarism, a state in which they could look for nothing beyond bare food, while even bare food, the treacherous potato being its staple, periodically failed. In such a condition, all social and prudential restraints on the increase of population were lost, and the people multiplied with animal recklessness far beyond the capacity of the island to maintain them. Desperately contending for the soil on which they solely depended for their maintenance, they became, in the most miserable sense, tenants-at-will, prædial serfs of the landlord, who ground them through his middleman, and sometimes through a series of middlemen forming a hierarchy of extortion. All the improvements of the tenant were confiscated by the owner of the soil. The only remedy for overpopulation, apart from the fell agencies of famine and disease, was emigration. The remedy for the agrarian evil and grievance, so far as it could be reached by legislation, apparently was some measure which would give the Irish tenant-at-will the same security for his holding which had been given to the English copyholder by custom and the favor of the courts. To buy out the Irish landlord was hardly just to the British people, and was a measure in itself of dangerous import. The abolition of the gentry by any means, if it could have been avoided, was a social mistake. The peasantry would thereby be deprived of the social chiefs, whose influence it specially needed, and there would be danger of handing the island over to the demagogue and the priest.

The political part of the problem, which concerned the rela-

tions between the two islands, had, when Mr. Gladstone came to deal with the question, assumed the aspect of a struggle for Home Rule. This was an ostensibly reduced and mitigated version of the struggle for the repeal of the Union, which had been set on foot by O'Connell, and, passing from him into more violent hands, had in 1848, under Smith O'Brien, come to an ignominious end in the "cabbage-garden." The political movement, apart from the agrarian insurrection, had never shown much force. It was not on political change that the heart of the Irish people was set, but on the secure possession of their holdings and their deliverance from the grasp of famine. But the new leader, Charles Stewart Parnell, a man of commanding character, combined the two objects, and the movement, carrying the people with it, became formidable in its political as well as in its agrarian form.

There had been, as we know, an immense Irish emigration to the United States. This, while it had somewhat relieved the pressure of population, had in another respect greatly added to the difficulty of the case. It had given birth to American Fenianism, with its *Clan-na-Gael*, an agitation wholly political, rabid, murderous, formidable from the influence of the Irish vote on American politicians, having its headquarters and its centre beyond the reach of British repression.

Gladstone had been in Ireland only for three weeks, and then, Mr. Morley says, he had not gone beyond a very decidedly English Pale. There is, at all events, no trace of his having studied on the spot the character of the people with whom he had to deal; the influences which were at work; the various forces, political, ecclesiastical, social, and economical, to the play of which he was going to deliver the island. Had he done this, he might have known why it was that Irish Liberals, like Lord O'Hagan and Sir Alexander Macdonald, while they were Irish patriots to the core, and because they were Irish patriots to the core, shrank with horror from the dissolution of the legislative union. He would have seen the probable fragility of any clause of a Home-Rule Act forbidding legislative preference of a particular religion, and the ease with which it could have been nullified by the Roman Catholic hierarchy and priesthood, wielding the influence which they wielded over the people and over popular elections. He would also have more vividly realized the danger attending the relation of Protestant and Saxon Ulster to the Celtic and Catholic

part of Ireland, when they faced each other in a separate arena and their conflict was uncontrolled.

With the agrarian grievance Mr. Gladstone undertook to deal by means of land legislation, purchasing for the people, or giving them the means of purchasing, the freehold of their lots. The operation, as has been said, was perilous, as it involved exceptional dealing with contracts, as well as an unusual employment of public money; and in its course it exposed Mr. Gladstone to angry charges, not only of violent legislation, but of deception, to which color may have been given by some shifting of his ground. A simple Act of the character above suggested might possibly have solved the problem with less of a shock to the sanctity of contracts and less disturbance of any kind; while it must be admitted that the conduct of Irish landlords generally to their tenantry had been such as to form a warrant, if their can be one, for drastic legislation.

The political part of the Parnell movement Mr. Gladstone had for some time strenuously and vehemently opposed. He denounced Parnell's policy as leading through rapine to dismemberment. He applied coercion vigorously to Irish outrage, imprisoned a number of Parnellites as suspects, and himself proclaimed the arrest of Parnell to an applauding multitude at Guild Hall. He allowed colleagues to rise night after night from his side, and denounce the Home-Rule movement in language even stronger than his own. But, having been defeated in the election of 1885 by the combined forces of Conservatives and Parnellites, he suddenly, to the amazement of everybody, and the general consternation of his party, turned round, declared in favor of Home Rule and coalesced with Parnell, by whose assistance he ousted the Conservative Government of Lord Salisbury, and reinstalled himself in power. It is not necessary to charge him with being actuated by love of power, or to say that his conversion was not sincere. It is due to him to bear in mind that the Conservative leaders, in what was called the Maamtrasna debate, had unquestionably coquetted with Parnellism, one of them, Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, courting Parnellite favor by censuring Lord Spencer; and that by this conduct on their part the aspect of the question had undergone a certain change. On the other hand, it is impossible to forget that Gladstone's position was that of leader of the Opposition, wishing to reinstate his party in

power, and seeing that this could be done only by the help of the Irish vote. Nor can we easily bring ourselves to accept the account of his gradual conversion to Home Rule put forth in his "History of an Idea." If he felt that his mind was moving on the subject, how could he have deemed it right not only to mark his own misgivings by vehement denunciations of Home Rule, but to lead his party and the nation on what he had begun to feel might prove to be the wrong line? His honesty, I repeat, need not be questioned. But neither his consistency nor the perfect singleness of his motive can very easily be maintained. He was a party leader; a full believer in the party system; and his party wanted to prevail over its rival. It is only by contention for power that party government can be carried on.

The political discontent would probably, as experience seemed to indicate, have subsided of itself when an end had been put to the material grievance and distress. Gladstone proposed to break the legislative Union and give Ireland a Parliament of her own. This Parliament he styled "statutory." Restrictions were to be laid upon it which would have made its relation to the British Parliament one of vassalage, and against which it would almost certainly have commenced, almost from the moment of its birth, a struggle for equality and independence. If it was baffled in that struggle, it might even have held out its hands for aid to the foreign enemies of Great Britain. The framer of the measure apparently had not distinctly made up his mind whether he would include the Irish in the Parliament of Great Britain or exclude them from it. That he should have rushed into legislation so momentous, legislation affecting the very existence of the United Kingdom, without having thoroughly made up his mind on the vital point, is surely a proof that, great as he was in finance, mighty as he was in debate, powerful as he was in framing and carrying measures of reform, when, as in the case of Irish Disestablishment or the Universities, a clear case was put into his hands, he was hardly one of those sure-footed statesmen to whom can be safely intrusted the supreme destinies of a nation.

If after the equitable settlement of the agrarian question and the reduction of the population to the number which the island can maintain, the political malady continues to defy cure, and the Irish contingent remains, as it has now for many years been, an alien and rebellious element in the British Parliament, disturbing

and distracting British councils, there may be a sufficient reason for letting Ireland go. There can be no good reason for keeping her as a mere thorn in the side of Great Britain. It is not unlikely that, after a trial of independence, she might of her own accord come back to the Union. But all wise statesmen have united in saying that there must be legislative Union or independence. Two Parliaments, two nations.*

The announcement of Gladstone's plan was followed by terrible searching of heart in his party, ending in a split. Lord Hartington undertook the leadership of the Unionist-Liberals, and showed unexpected energy and ability in his new part. The fatal blow was the declared opposition of Bright, the life-long advocate of justice to Ireland, the great pillar of political righteousness. Mr. Chamberlain, as Gladstone said at the time, played for safety in either event. He declared himself ready to vote for federation, but not for Gladstone's scheme. He was thus able, according to the turn which events might take, to say either that he had been in favor of Home Rule or that he had been against it.

The stoutest opposition and that which did most to save the integrity of the United Kingdom was made, as I shall always hold, by *The Times*. The error into which it fell with regard to the Parnell Letters was a trifling matter compared with the memorable service which it rendered on the whole to the Unionist cause.

When the contest had begun, Gladstone's pugnacity broke all bounds. He appealed to separatist sentiment in Scotland and Wales, as well as in Ireland. He appealed to the "masses" against the "classes." He appealed to ignorance against intelligence and the professions. One of the most eminent of his life-long friends and admirers, who had held high office in his Government, said in a letter to me "Gladstone is morally insane." He had lost the personal influences by which his impulses had been controlled. Graham, Newcastle, Sydney Herbert, Cardwell, all were gone. Cardwell especially, a man eminently sure-footed and cool-headed, had, I suspect, while he lived, exercised an important and salutary though unfelt restraint.

*I used to think that an occasional session, or even a single session, of the United Parliament at Dublin, for the special settlement of Irish affairs, Irish character being what it is, might have a good effect on the Irish heart. It might put an end to the feeling which at present prevails, that the united Parliament is alien to Ireland and almost a foreign power. The suggestion was considered, but the inconvenience was deemed too great. Yet, inconvenience would have been cheaply incurred if the measure could have answered its purpose.

Carried away by his excitement, Gladstone traduced the authors of the Union and their work, a work which he had once coupled with the treaty of commerce with France as supremely honorable to Pitt. "A horrible and strange history, for no epithets weaker than these can in the slightest degree describe or indicate ever so faintly the means by which, in defiance of the national sentiment of Ireland, consent to the Union was attained." Such is his language, and he compares the transaction in atrocity to the massacre of St. Bartholomew. Consent to the Union was attained by the absolute necessity, plain to men of sense, of putting an end to murderous anarchy and averting a renewal of '98. It has been clearly shown that there was no bribery or none of a serious kind. The indemnities for the owners of pocket boroughs were paid, in accordance with the notions of the day and under an Act of Parliament, alike to those who had voted for the Union and to those who had voted against it. The oligarchy to whose local reign the measure put an end was appeased with peerages and appointments, the scramble for which might well disgust a high-minded man like Cornwallis. This was probably inevitable in those days, and was hardly so bad as the massacre of St. Bartholomew. Satisfactorily to obtain the national consent was impossible. The Parliament was a Protestant oligarchy, the Catholics being still excluded, and it was deeply stained with the atrocities of repression. Ireland, in fact, was not a nation, or capable of giving a national consent; it was a country divided between two races antagonistic in religion and at deadly enmity with each other. The submission of the question to the constituencies by the holding of a general election, five-sixths of the population being excluded from Parliament, would have been futile, and would very likely have revived the civil war. Pitt, it is true, held out to the Catholics a hope of political emancipation. That hope he did his best to fulfil, but he was prevented by the fatuous obstinacy of the King; and Mr. Gladstone, who was a devout monarchist, might have been challenged to say what, when met by the Royal veto, Pitt could have done. The promise remained in abeyance for one generation, at the end of which it was fulfilled. These bitter appeals to Irish hatred of the Union and belief that it was a deadly and inextinguishable wrong, did not come well from the author of a measure intended, as he professed, to pluck the thorn out of the Irish heart.

The Bill was defeated in the House of Commons by a majority of thirty votes; and, on an appeal to the country, the Liberal-Unionists combining with the Conservatives on the special question, the Opposition won by upwards of a hundred. Six years afterwards, by another turn of the wheel, the Salisbury Government losing strength, Gladstone found himself again at the head of the Government, but with a weak majority made up largely of the Irish vote. Then came the catastrophe of Parnell, who, at the critical moment, was convicted of *crim. con.* It is impossible to read Mr. Morley's account of the scene of wild distraction which ensued, matrimonial morality struggling with political convenience, and of the sorrowful decision of Gladstone that *crim. con.* would be an awkward thing to carry in face of the Nonconformist conscience, without feeling the presence of a comic element in the narrative.

Home-Rule, however, was again put to the vote, and in its strangest form, Ireland being given a Parliament of her own, and, at the same time, a representation in the British Parliament with full liberty of voting on all British questions. That the Irish delegation would barter its vote to British parties for Irish objects, and especially for the relaxation of restrictions on its plenary power, was what nobody could fail to foresee. A more extraordinary proposal, surely, never was made to any legislature. It might have been accepted by a conquered country. The one recommendation that Home Rule had was, that it would rid the British Parliament of an alien and hostile element. That element Gladstone's Bill would have retained in its worst form. The Bill, however, was carried in the Commons by a majority of thirty-four, some of the English members probably giving a party vote in the assurance that the Bill would be thrown out by the House of Lords. By the House of Lords the Bill was thrown out with a vengeance. Its author, after vainly trying to raise a storm against the Lords, resigned, ostensibly on a difference with the Admiralty about naval expenditure. One of the most memorable careers in English history came to an end. The party which Gladstone led was utterly shattered, and shattered it still remains. Palmerston, could he have looked upon the scene, might have said that his cynical prophecy had been really fulfilled.

Gladstone in addition to his immense amount of public work was a voluminous author; the more voluminous because his style,

formed by public and *ex tempore* speaking, though perfectly clear and correct, was certainly diffuse. His biographer shows good judgment by dwelling no more than he can help on this part of the subject. Readers of "Homeric Studies" and "*Juventus Mundi*" must wonder how such things can have been written and given to the press by so great a man. Stranger things have seldom come from any pen than the pages of the Traditive Element in Homeric Theo-Mythology, connecting Latona with the Virgin, Apollo with the Deliverer of mankind, and Ate with the Tempter. All these volumes are full of fantastic and baseless speculation. The fancy that there was an Egyptian epoch in the early history of Greece appears to be partly suggested by an accidental similarity between the names of an Egyptian and a Bœotian city. Not on such reasonings were the famous budgets based.

I was with Gladstone one day, when, our business having been done, he began to talk of Homer, and imparted to me a theory which he had just woven out of some fancied philological discovery. I felt sure that the theory was baseless and tried to convince him that it was. But he was never very open to argument. Just as I had succumbed, the door opened and his brother-in-law, Lord Lyttelton, came in. Lord Lyttelton was a first-rate classical scholar, and I felt sure that he would see the question aright and prevail. See the question aright he did; prevail he did not; and the discovery has probably taken its place beside those of the traditive element.

Before the publication of "*Juventus Mundi*," I think it was, there was a Homeric dinner at which, with Cornewall Lewis, Milman, and some other scholars I had the honor of being present. It was a very delightful reunion. No one could be more charming socially than our host. But I doubt whether the critical effect was great.

Gladstone had in part put off his Establishmentarianism, but his orthodoxy and belief in the inspiration of the Bible remained unimpaired. This deprives his theological writings of serious value, though they still have interest as the work of a mind at once powerful and intensely religious, dealing with topics of the highest concern. It is not difficult to meet Hume's philosophic objection to miracles, which seems little more than an assumption of the absolute impossibility of a sufficient amount of evidence—an assumption hardly warrantable; for if the death of a man and

his restoration to life were witnessed and certified by a great body of scientific men, in circumstances such as to preclude the possibility of imposture, we should not withhold our belief, however contrary the occurrence might be to the ordinary course of nature. But we cannot believe anything contrary to the ordinary course of nature on the testimony of an anonymous gospel of uncertain authorship, of uncertain date, the product of an uncritical age, containing matter apparently mythical and written in the interest of a particular religion. From considering the question in this point of view, Gladstone by his literalism is debarred. So, in his critical work on Butler, he is debarred from free and fruitful discussion by the assumption, which he all the time carries with him, of the authenticity of Revelation. His belief in the inspiration of the Bible seems to go so far as to include belief in the longevity of the Patriarchs before the flood.*

Venturing to break a lance with Huxley about the truth of the account of creation in Genesis, he could not fail to be overthrown. His apology seems to amount to this; that the Creator in imparting an account of the creation to Moses, was so far well-informed that the account could, by dint of very ingenious interpretation, be made not wholly irreconcilable with scientific fact. Gladstone continued greatly to venerate Newman, and apparently allowed himself to be influenced in his reasoning by the "Grammar of Assent," a sort of *vade mecum* of self-sophistication, the characteristic purport of the Cardinal's very subtle but not very robust or very veracious mind.

If in one or two points in this article I have ventured to differ from Mr. Morley, it has been with deference to his superior knowledge of Gladstone, and without prejudice to my sincere admiration for his book.

GOLDWIN SMITH.

* "The immense longevity of the early generations of mankind was eminently favorable to the preservation of pristine traditions. Each individual, instead of being, as now, a witness of, or an agent in, one or two transmissions from father to son, would observe or share in ten times as many. According to the Hebrew Chronology, Lamech, the father of Noah, was of mature age before Adam died: and Abraham was of mature age before Noah died. Original or early witnesses, remaining so long as standards of appeal, would evidently check the rapidity of the darkening and destroying process."—"Studies on Homer and the Homeric Age," II., 4, 5.